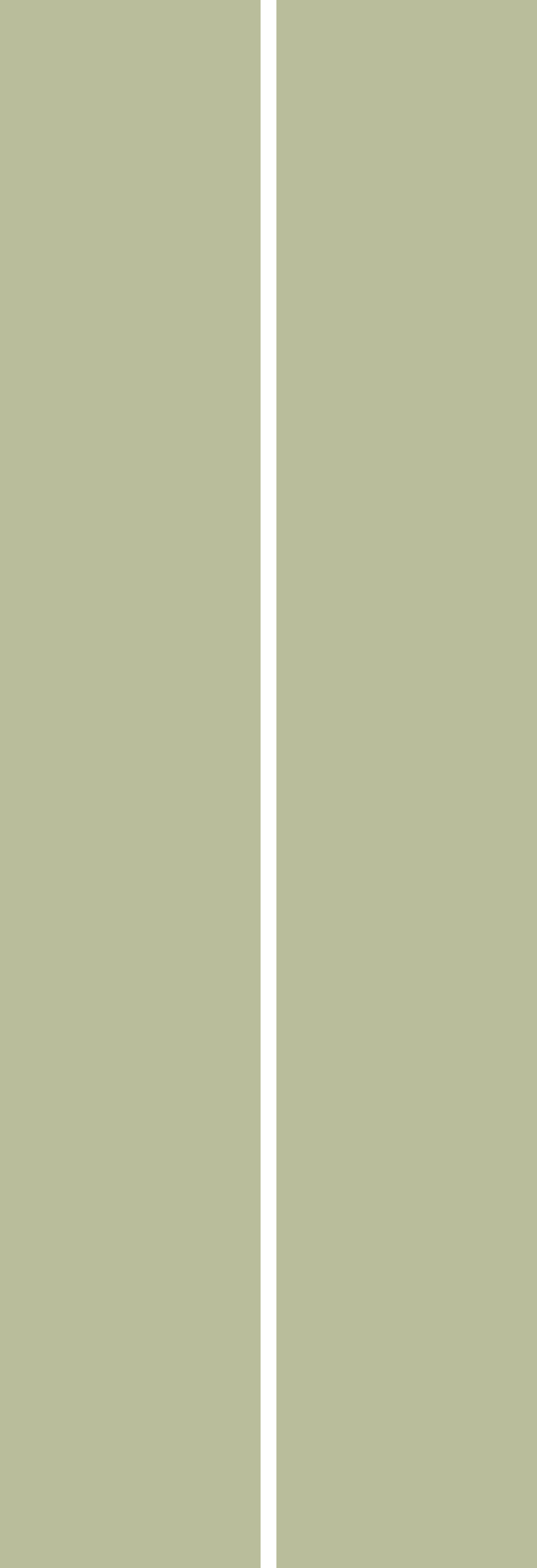


**Courage
&
Strength**

**The Reflections
&
Renewal of
UFT Members,
Ten Years after
September 11**





UFT members work every day to make a difference in people's lives. On September 11, 2001, in the face of horror and uncertainty, we were there to make a crucial and, in many cases, a life-saving difference. Teachers, nurses, guidance counselors, paraprofessionals and others led their charges out of danger, made sure students across the city were cared for while communication and transportation systems were frozen, and calmed the fears of hundreds of thousands of other children. They set a shining example of courage and inspiration.

This book is filled with a few of the many heartfelt stories that we have gathered from members about that horrendous day and its aftermath. They reflect the best in all of us.



Michael Mulgrew

UFT President

FIRST MOMENTS

September 11, 2001 marked my third day of teaching in a public school. In the beginning days of school, there were many announcements being made over the intercom reminding teachers to begin their lessons, to bring down attendance, and to say goodbye to parents who were still lingering; each announcement was more distracting for me than the previous, none of which I heard because I was battling with my kindergartners for quiet. So when the school secretary came into my room at 9:15 to see if I wanted to call my family, I was, of course, confused. "Why? Did something happen?"

"Aren't you listening to the announcements?"

I wasn't.

"A plane has hit the World Trade Center."

Frozen in disbelief, I was certain Alice was mistaken, that she had just heard incorrectly. Instead she insisted that it was true and asked me if I'd like to go to the corner of our street to see for myself. Our corner gave way to a once perfect view of the majestic buildings.

So I left my classroom with another teacher to see for myself that the buildings were, in fact, aflame. They were. And I called my family.

In the hour that followed, students were dismissed one-by-one with their moms and dads and caregivers, until that last child fell prey to the days that lay ahead, days that they would likely not understand nor would they soon forget.

Later that morning, I returned to the corner to see what had transpired outside my confusing world at 116 West 11th Street. There, I saw hundreds of New Yorkers lined up to give blood at St. Vincent's Hospital. And I saw parents, children and passers-by standing tearful and motionless.

The Twin Towers were gone.

Nancy S. Wahl

We begin the lesson, a short story by Edgar Allen Poe.

It is September 11, a Tuesday, 8:45 a.m., the sky is clear and blue, the air crisp and clean, a stellar September morning by all accounts. As we read on, I stand at my desk, textbook in hand, every now and then stealing a glance at the blue sky through a set of four, six foot high windows; just beyond these windows can be seen downtown Brooklyn and the Manhattan skyline.

A student who has been reading aloud comes to the end of the quote, and with that, another student, Debra, shoots up her hand.

"Debra?"

I wait for my student to make some astute comment concerning the reading, but am puzzled by her reaction. From her seat, Debra turns her gaze toward the windows, sets her sights on something far beyond our classroom and then, finally breaking the silence, politely asks, "Is that the World Trade Center on fire?"

I walk over to the window, and suddenly my eyes are caught by the sight of what appears to be flames coming out of the top floors of one of the Towers. I turn back to face the class, but most of the students are already out of their seats, having made a beeline for the windows. Quite suddenly we are all standing there looking out through those large classroom windows, bearing witness to what is happening before us.

For a moment there is an eerie silence in the room, then one of my students cuts through the silence, points to the tower just across the East River, the tower whose flames keeps growing even higher, and says out loud in a matter-of-fact voice, to all of us, to none of us in particular: "My mother is in there."

Phyllis Witte



I was presenting a library orientation lesson to a 2nd grade class, when another teacher came in and asked me to turn on the TV because “something terrible was happening in Manhattan.” I turned on the TV and turned it away from the class and watched the horrible events out of the corner of my eye while giving a cheerful lesson to the children, as other teachers came in.

Of course we all thought it was an accident at first and then we saw the second plane. We remembered that we would be able to see the towers from the library window and watched in horror as the second plane struck; we saw it in a kind of double vision from the window and on TV.

By then the children were aware that something was happening and asked what was wrong. Since we really didn’t know the ramifications at that point, we said there was a very bad fire in Manhattan.

It was after the children returned to their classroom with their teacher that we heard about the Pentagon, the crash in Pennsylvania, and saw the towers collapse.

The rest of the day was tense. Several staff members had family who worked in the towers and we waited in fear until we heard that they were safe. (Later we would find out that several staff members had lost friends, or the sons of friends.) The office staff were fielding phone calls from frantic parents needing to be reassured that their children were safe, and of course many parents came to school to take their children home. We had to firmly insist that they behave calmly so as to not frighten the children.

The principal and any teachers that could, would stay until every child was picked up. The last child was accounted for at approximately 6 p.m. with many tales of escape on foot from lower Manhattan and long travel delays.

Joan Malewitz

My third graders were working on a writing project when the classroom phone rang. The office said to pack up one of my students because she was going home. I no sooner got her packed up when the phone rang again and two more students were going home. I asked the office why were all these students leaving. “Oh I guess no one came to your classroom. We will send someone up.”

Georgia appeared at my door and said, “We aren’t sure what is going on but a plane has hit the World Trade Center. Go to my office. You can see it from my window.” Smoke was streaming up hundreds of feet in the air. I thought of all the class trips I had taken to the top of the World Trade Center and feared for those who were trapped on the top floors. Who knew that it would be the last time I would see the towers grace the New York skyline?

I kept the students on task and tried to stay calm. Georgia said that I needed to find out if any student had a parent who works in Manhattan, but not tell them yet what is going on.

I announced to the class that we were going to switch to Math. “Children, just a few days ago we learned how to take a survey and record it on a tally table. Mrs. Rocco said that she thinks more of our parents work in Manhattan. I think more of our parents work in Queens. Let’s take a tally and see who is right!” I proceeded to mark their replies on a chart and put a check on a class list circling the names of students who said their parents worked in Manhattan. One student proudly said his Mom’s office is in the biggest building in Manhattan but didn’t know if it was the towers or the Empire State building. I put a red star next to his name and prayed for her safety.

Students left one by one. The children who were not picked up were sent to the library. When I opened the door to the room I saw the smoky view and quickly pulled the shades. My mind was racing. “How am I going to keep them safe? What if they attack other parts of the city? I need to keep them away from the windows. What do I tell them? Should we go to the basement where the walls are thicker? How will I comfort the children if they lose a loved one?”

I can see it all, relive it all.

Patricia Schulze

ESCAPE

We came out on Thames Street and made the right towards Greenwich Street. When we got to the corner and looked up, we were almost under the World Trade Center.

There were people everywhere; so it was difficult to keep the children in check, but as we walked we just continued to move along, sweeping with us any children that we encountered. Leadership High School, our sister school, is right across the street from us, and they evacuated at the same time we did.

Some of the students we met were from Leadership; some were from our school. We did not care; we just moved them along. We got to the entry of Battery Park and then wondered what next. But the sight of the towers in flames and filled with smoke was so menacing, instinctively we knew that we just had to keep moving away from the site.

On my way, I encountered a teacher who had just started at our school the week before, when school opened. She was very agitated. She told me that she could not keep her group together, that they were scattering everywhere. I tried to calm her.

About five minutes later I encountered another teacher who was having a panic attack. I gave her some reassuring words, calmed her, and proceeded to walk with her. I had my arm around her waist, and she put her arm around my shoulder. She felt better pretty quickly, smiled and thanked me for helping her. After we

walked about a block, I felt that she was okay so I proceeded very gently to peel her arm from my shoulder, and I let go of her waist. We had barely let go of each other when I met up with a student from one of my classes. Classes had only met four times for the term, but I recognized her. She too was panicking and starting to cry. I stopped to calm her, while the other teacher moved on.

I told the student that she was not to worry that everything was going to be all right. I put my arms around her, and I told her that she was not going to get hurt. She looked up at me, smiled, and said "okay." No sooner than I had uttered those reassuring words, we heard this eerie sound. It sounded like thousands of nails falling down in a pile. I looked up and saw the South Tower come tumbling down, and with its demise came a humongous mushroom of dust and debris hurtling itself towards us.

I tried to remain calm. I turned to the student and told her that we needed to run. As we ran towards the Staten Island ferry, I kept looking back, and all I could see was that mushroom of stuff gaining on us. I had just promised this young lady that she would be all right, so I felt a great deal of responsibility to protect her. At this point, with every one fleeing and not knowing what would happen next, I felt that I might die, but I was going to do my best to protect my student.

Catherine Heron

I was a science teacher at the High School for Leadership and Public Service, located less than 500 yards from the South Tower. I was there on 9-11-01 and evacuated kids to Battery Park.

When we got to street level, the first thing everybody saw was how many people were on the street. There were thousands of people on the street. I was worried about my kids, especially the ones straggling so at that point we knew we had to get these kids out of here. In just a few minutes, you really didn't know who was your student and who wasn't. I had them for only two days.

We got as far as Rector Street and I remember turning around to see how many students were back there and how many were ahead of me. We watched the top of the south tower start to slide off and then realized the building was actually coming down. And that's when we said to our kids, you can run, run as fast as you can and get to Battery Park. We were engulfed in the cloud and at that point it was hard to know who was next to you; eventually it got to the point where you couldn't even see your hand in front of your face. We were even taking socks off and putting them around people's faces because of all the dust and everything that was coming down.

The experience propelled me to create an environmental civics club...something that could help us improve the health of the community near our school. Our thoughts were especially with our freshmen because this was a new neighborhood for them and they were only here for two or three days

before this happened. Many teachers spent time trying to create projects or come up with ideas to somehow help empower kids who were just here for a short while and had become victimized like that.

The first project we did was to bring students back to the very park we were evacuated to, less than three months later, to plant tulip bulbs donated from Holland. We felt our freshmen were not even familiar with our school (they had experienced only two school days prior) and we did not want them to feel victimized.

The only way to do that at first, we felt, was to bring them back to Battery Park to plant flowers. Our students soon learned that, rather than feel like victims who were helpless, they became survivors who became empowered. Since that first planting, our school's Environmental Civics Club and Green Task Forces grew and have planted over a quarter of a million bulbs and flowers at Battery Park in the Bosque area and the Gardens of Remembrance and several thousand across the street from our school at Trinity Church Cemetery Gardens. We also worked on the Tiles for America Project, which you can still see on the corner of 11th Street and 7th Avenue.

The whole New York community came together. I felt like over the next couple of weeks, you didn't hear people talking about politics, didn't hear people talking about divisiveness. There was really a feeling that we have to help each other, we have to come together.

Daniel Fielding

There isn't a day that goes by that I don't think of "that day." 9/11 forever changed my life.

The morning was so beautiful, a crisp September morning with a sky as blue as a photo backdrop. I arrived in my school building, Murry Bergrum High School around 7:45 a.m. It was just another school day with its usual programming concerns and questions. I found myself in the stairwell, between the 4th and 5th floors. I felt a rumbling in the stairwell and I lost my footing and was knocked forward.

As I exited the stairwell onto the 5th floor, I looked out of the window and saw one of the World Trade Center towers on fire, burning. I called the principal from the nearest office and asked her what was going on. She said, "Bethann, the entire first floor and my office is swarming with a police presence from One Police Plaza." The next thing I knew, the fire alarms sounded and I knew we had to get 35 physically challenged students out of the building safely.

As we exited the building, all of the children were around us and we saw both towers burning. We knew we had to move the children to safety, away

from the building. The heat from the fire was so intense, we felt it from where we were. We were told that many of the school buses would not be able to make it to the school to pick up the children.

I tried to make it to my car with three students, hoping to drive them across the bridge, to the Brooklyn side and a police officer stopped me and told me that all the bridges had been closed. I asked the officer since the children were from Brooklyn, could he possibly radio the precinct on the Brooklyn side and have squad cars prepared to pick up the children and take them home. I felt so helpless... then started walking... walking... walking across the Manhattan bridge.

My thanks to all the kind people who assisted us along the way with the children. Many of the children had motorized wheelchairs that lost power but, thanks to courageous New Yorkers, we received so much assistance.

So many people were so very selfless and helpful and the children and I will be forever grateful to them.

Bethann Kramer

In August 2001, I began working as a temporary employee in the law department of the Port Authority of NY/NJ in the North Tower on the 66th floor.

On Tuesday morning, September 11, 2001, it was a bright and sunny day. I was trying to catch the train when a woman stepped in front of me causing me to miss the train. When I arrived at the last stop of the E train (World Trade Center), I proceeded to head to the first set of elevators that I would normally take to get to my desk on the 66th floor. Once I got to the elevators, I heard a few people say that the elevators were not working. Not knowing what to do, I decided to go outside to call my office to see why the elevators were not working. Things seemed calm as I passed through the stores in the basement, but as I got closer to the escalator located near the Borders bookstore, I saw people running up and outside the building.

When I came outside of the North Tower, I saw people watching the building intently. I didn't know why until I looked up and saw fire.

I made it to Broadway and Fulton Street right in front of the Chase bank. I realized that my cell phone wasn't working and decided to use a pay phone. Apparently, everyone had the same problem and there were long lines at the pay phones I had seen nearby.

After I made my phone calls, I learned that all trains and buses in the area were shut down. At this point, I was standing in front of J&R computer store as many others and I watched both towers burning in horror.

Then finally the South Tower collapsed which sent everyone running. I was about to run when a man grabbed me and said "Don't run yet. You'll get trampled over." The man and I stood

and watched people run as a huge black cloud slowly approached our direction. As it got even closer, the man turned to me and said "Now would be the time to start running." I started to run but the huge black cloud overcame me. Once I was caught in it, time stood still. I could not see nor hear anything. It was pitch black and there was dead silence. I started to use my arms and hands to feel my way in front and at my sides. I was on the Brooklyn Bridge. One truck stopped and the driver told me to get in so he could take me to safety in downtown Brooklyn. He picked up a few more people along the way. The driver handed me a rag to use to clean myself.

I didn't know what I looked like when I arrived in downtown Brooklyn. Several people stopped to stare, ask me questions and/or give me hugs. I was shown how I looked in the mirror and I finally understood why. I was completely covered from head to toe with the debris from the South Tower collapse. I stopped by a construction site where workers turned on a hydrant for me to rinse the rag and clean myself. They also gave me iced tea to clear my throat.

Now began the journey of finding my way home to the Bronx from Brooklyn. I was on autopilot and could not think about what had happened. I just wanted to go home.

As I look back, I am thankful for the woman who stepped in front of me causing me to miss my train, the man who stopped me from running once the South Tower collapsed, the man who brought me to safety in downtown Brooklyn, and the construction workers who gave me iced tea and turned on the hydrant. That was divine intervention.

Ellen B. Manigault

CALM AND COLLECTED

By the time the second tower was hit, parents were streaming to the school to pick up their children. A command post was established in the principal's office and two locations were set up to sign out students; one in the library for elementary students and another in the auditorium for I.S. students. All support staff stepped up. Instruction carried on as usual as school aides gathered students from classrooms after emergency blue cards were checked. There were no titles that day, no distinction between administration and staff. We were just human beings trying to do our jobs.

Therese Boulanger

It was surreal to be teaching my regular lesson after what I had just seen. My thoughts were: protect them; they're in a different world; be in their world with them – one that's happy, free and without a care.

Parents arrived putting on brave faces for their children, some hiding tears of not knowing whether their Wall Street husbands and wives were safe.

Laurie Yorr

Parents were running into the building, crying, demanding to get their children. We had to quickly organize ourselves, calm the parents, try not to alarm the children and release children to parents in an organized fashion.

During all this we were shocked and had to remain composed. As always, New York City teachers placed the well-being of their students first.

Roberta Ann Afflitto

Everyone in school banded together to be sure that our children were safe and well taken care of until they could be picked up by their parent or guardian.

Although everyone was frightened and worried about what would happen next, our faculty remained calm and focused on the children. I was very proud of my colleagues on 9/11. They showed true strength and courage when it was most needed. Their dedication to their students was evident when they placed the students' needs first and did all they could to reassure and keep a sense of calm.

Phyllis Mifsud

It was Primary Day. I was leafletting near Brooklyn Borough Hall. Suddenly, we heard an explosion. We stopped campaigning and headed for the promenade. There the sight of one of the towers burning stopped us cold.

The rest of the day — I've never spent so much time at 110 Livingston — was spent in a blur of meetings, phone calls and huddles, gathering information on the state of the schools, making tough decisions on how to proceed, anxiously locating family and friends, sighing each time someone was safe, and crying each time someone was not.

As the towers collapsed, the mayor understandably wanted to evacuate all the schools, send every child home immediately. Chancellor Levy was ready to go along, but I strongly urged them to reconsider. How could we send the children into the streets, into the unknown? What if they couldn't get home? What if no one was home? What if there were more attacks? There were all kinds of 'what ifs,' some too terrible to think about. Wouldn't they be safer in the schools?

Convinced, the chancellor ordered the schools locked down. Together we developed a dismissal plan.

As evening approached, we needed to make a decision about the next day. Again understandably, the mayor's office pressed for a return to normalcy as soon as possible. The schools should open, they argued. But again I differed. And again the mayor listened. Families would be able to spend Wednesday together, absorbing what had happened, explaining it to the children, helping them feel safe in this new, scary world.

It was not until later that I learned of the miracles you had wrought, the extent of your professionalism, your dedication, your ingenuity and, yes, your heroism.

Across the city, teachers calmed nervous parents, reassured frightened youngsters (some of whom had witnessed the attacks and their aftermath from their classroom windows), stayed late until children could be picked up and even accompanied them home when no one showed up. Some teachers took children to their own homes to stay until family members could retrieve them. Across the city, hundreds of high school students found themselves stranded, unable to reach home. Gymnasiums became temporary shelters, and teachers stayed the night, sleeping in shifts.

But the most harrowing stories are those of the teachers and other educators in the nine downtown Manhattan schools that had to evacuate because of their proximity to the World Trade Center and the immediate and life-threatening danger from fireballs and falling debris. Two high schools exited their buildings just as the second tower collapsed. One teacher led his charges into a parking garage for protection from the tumbling girders. Others herded teenagers onto ferries to get away from the choking smoke, and one even hailed a tugboat! Another, in true teacher fashion, had been urging his students to walk, not run, as they calmly left their school. But he abandoned all his training when he saw the ball of smoke and airborne glass rolling toward them down the street. "Run," he shouted. "Run as fast as you can!" And they did.

I wish more people could hear the stories I've heard in the last few days. New Yorkers and Americans everywhere, including me, have been singing the praises of the brave firefighters, police and other rescue workers who saved lives, and perished, on that awful day. Those men and women deserve all the accolades we can give them. But less heard and far less sung is the heroism of New York's educators. And what makes that resourcefulness and bravery even more admirable is the fact that — unlike the police, fire and other emergency workers — you weren't trained for what you had to do that day.

From those who assured frightened children with the calmest certitude that everything would be all right (despite their own fears that nothing would ever be the same again) to those who led, carried and dragged countless youngsters to safer ground, UFT members displayed the best of what our profession stands for. At P.S. 89 a teacher told me, "For us it's not a job; it's our life!"

Although you may never be the recipient of medals or memorialized in monuments, you have earned the appreciation of thousands of parents whose children arrived safely home that Tuesday afternoon. One kindergarten summed it up for all those kids. "How did you get out?" his mother worriedly inquired. Matter-of-factly, he replied, "The teacher held my hand."

Randi Weingarten

On that fateful day I was awakened by a phone call. At the time I had just gotten my bachelors degree in Production Management from Tisch School of the Arts at NYU. I was still in the process of deciding if I was going into television production, becoming a New York City Police Officer, or pursuing a master's degree in Education so that I could become a teacher. I was 22 years old. I also was and still am a New York City Auxiliary Police Officer. That January I had been promoted to the rank of Sergeant.

I was awakened by a phone call. One of my officers called me and in a panicked voice told me "Sarge, Sarge, turn on the TV."

I flagged down a taxi and after some convincing that I was not going all the way downtown, took me to my command. I was working out of the 13th Precinct at the time.

As we stepped out of the station house the first tower fell. Everyone was mobilized. It was a very hectic day. We helped to turn around all traffic so that even 2nd Avenue became an uptown street. By the end of the day most of lower Manhattan was emptied out. It was like a ghost town as you got further downtown. They needed help escorting out-of-town iron workers to the site. We knew where we had to go so we took our police car and went downtown.

I would later attend 19 funerals for friends, people I knew, and strangers who wore a uniform similar to me and who were in that way related to me.

Those are my memories of that day. I teach it to my students each and every year and will until the day I die. My friends are gone but they will never, ever be forgotten.

Seth Gilman

The fear on the children's faces, the concern etched on the teachers' faces. All day long we heard the sound of sirens, fire engines, patrol cars and ambulances, along with the announcements over the public address system of the names of the children lucky enough to be going home with their anxious parents.

How do you tell the little ones? They knew something was wrong. They knew their classmates were going home. We hugged them and assured them that we were there for them. We kept them busy (with) math and writing and singing. It was well past dismissal time but we were not to leave the building until each child was picked up. With only one child left, an 8th grader, and no way for her mother to reach us, I volunteered to drive her home.

That brutal act of terrorism accomplished one thing for us. It made our students grow up. A big shock like that makes you realize how valuable life is and how inconsequential some of the little problems you have are.

What had amazed me was the feeling of kinship among us. Students in one class alone came from all over the world including Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Yemen, Brazil, Guinea, Haiti, China, Taiwan, Trinidad, Ecuador, Guyana, Italy, Spain, Guatemala, Chile, Antigua, Germany and Croatia.

That day we were all united. We stood together because first and foremost we were proud to be Americans!

Norka M. Freyre Garcia

I will always be very proud of everyone who was working at P.S. 128 that day on 9/11. It showed the true character of those who went into teaching and stayed in it with a true commitment to the children and the broader community.

Many of us are still asked where we were on that day in September, on that day when so many perished.

There were students who had lost family members. There were staff who had friends that had vanished. Grief workshops followed the days and weeks after the initial shock.

As time passed, we found out even more about how many of our students were affected by this horrendous event.

I wish all of it never happened, but it did. However, I can say with certainty, that when I am asked where I was that day, I will always be at peace knowing that I was in a place where courage and strength prevailed.

Gail F. Burrows

At around 11a.m., nurses at the Visiting Nurse Service office at 1250 Broadway were asked to volunteer to help staff triage centers down at the World Trade Center. Michael Soccio, an RN, immediately volunteered.

Michael, who travels around the city by bicycle, was able to get down to the World Trade Center within minutes. He just flew down Second Avenue on his bike. And helped set up a triage unit at Duane and Lafayette.

For the next two hours, Michael and the other medical personnel at the triage unit waited for the victims to be brought in – but none arrived.

At around 1 p.m., a police officer came over to the triage unit and told everyone that they were going to start receiving victims. “You’re going to have a long night in front of you,” said the police officer.

But still no victims arrived.

After about an hour, Michael heard that they couldn’t get victims to them because crushed Police and Fire Department vehicles were blocking the way. So the triage unit was moved to Ground Zero.

The doctors and nurse were all given respiratory masks to put on. Then New York City buses arrived to take them to Ground Zero.

It was very frightening. The air was completely dark with thick smoke and there was destruction everywhere – blasted out building windows, demolished cars, debris in the streets, and thick grey silt on every surface imaginable.

“It was like a war zone,” Michael said.

The buses were about one block from the World Trade Center when they had to quickly back up – one of the World Trade Center buildings was about to collapse. Buses then brought Michael and other medical personnel to Stuyvesant High School, where Michael helped set up a triage center. He stayed there into the evening.

At about 8 p.m., with still no civilian victims showing up, Michael, numb, frightened, and shocked by all he witnessed that day, left to go home.

***Front Line Focus Special
Issue 2001, “September 11
How VNSNY Responded”***

LOSS & RENEWAL

September 11, 2001 started out as a beautiful day and it ended as the worst day of my life. I was a senior in high school when word came that a plane went into the World Trade Center. As the day went on rumors were going through the school and I couldn't wait to go home.

My father was a Battalion Chief, my mother a school secretary, three brothers were firefighters, and one brother a Port Authority police officer. My sister, Mary, is a special education teacher.

When I finally got home from school I found out that my father was seriously hurt after being in the collapse of both towers and was brought to a hospital. My brother Firefighter Joey P. Henry, 25 years old and working at Ladder 21 in Manhattan, was missing. My other brothers were at Ground Zero looking for Joey. My uncle found my father at Columbia Presbyterian Hospital and when he was told Joey was missing he came home in his hospital gown, seriously hurt and covered in debris. Days went by and we received no information regarding Joey. It was the worst tragedy a family could go through. We had a memorial for Joey on October 5th, but he was never found.

My family and I had a lot of help from counselors since September 11 and when I graduated from St. John's University I went to Long Island University and received my master's degree in guidance counseling. I am now a guidance counselor at P.S. 249, the Caton School and I feel that I am giving back for all the help my family received.

Kathleen Henry-Amsterdam

I loved my common-law husband very much. His name was John Andreacchio.

We all called him by his nickname "Jack" or as he preferred, "Jack E Blu." He died in the World Trade Center on 9/11. He worked at Fuji Bank on the 81st floor in Tower 2. I was teaching my physical education class in my school, Erasmus Hall, at the time. Another teacher came to get me to come to the phone. My son Chris was calling to tell me the WTC was hit with a plane.

I ran out of the gym, down the stairs and to the lot where my car was parked. I miraculously made it home. I guess an angel was driving with me. My son arrived home shortly after I did. My parents and family called me and said they couldn't get to me because the Verrazano bridge was closed. Friends and neighbors arrived all day to join us to wait for word from Jack.

That word didn't come until three weeks later when the police came to his sister's door. We found out later that when the plane hit, Jack was with his friend on the 70th floor and the PA said all was fine and they could return to their offices. His friend and most of those there left at that time and made it out alive. Jack couldn't do that because he was on his company's safety team and wanted to make sure that the people on his floor were all evacuated before he left. Then the second plane hit. There were communications between Jack and those from his company who were outside the building. He was trying to find a way to evacuate the building but every exit way was blocked. He was still trying when the tower collapsed.

My son lost his dearest friend, and I lost my love. We both suffered tremendously. Jack E Blu was a man who gave his life for his friends. You don't get over that kind of man.

Francine Skye Morales Lentini

Someone from the office came to the classroom door, and told me that the World Trade Center was on fire, and not to let the children look out the window. Knowing that my son Keith, a medic with New York Hospital would be there, I was concerned, but not overly so at the time. I went on with the first period lesson, and at the beginning of the second period, someone else came to the door and asked if I needed to make a phone call. I went into the library across the hall and used the phone to call my son's cell. I left a message.

The TV was on in the library, and there was a group of staff watching. The first tower began to fall, and we were all horrified. I was more concerned, but had to get back to class. If there's anything that can take your mind off something troubling you, it's a class of (more than) 20 4th graders! So we went on with the second period lesson.

As the morning went on, students began to be picked up by parents. The class started asking questions and I told them there was a fire at the World Trade Center and some parents came to get their children because they had left work. We talked about fire safety, and what people could do to get out of the buildings.

By noon, most students had been picked up, and our principal told us to go home. Most of us live on Long island, and we kind of followed each other in our cars, not getting very far, as the bridges were closed and parkways were clogged.

Our son, Keith was found 6 months later, as was his partner. But it was when I returned to school about 10 days later that my experience was so wonderful. I let my students know by coming back to school that I was still their teacher. They had been told what happened to my son and were full of questions. I told them they could ask me anything. They were so gentle and kind to me! They had been so worried, I learned, about me. There was not much teaching done that day for me. I learned from them! They truly helped me those six months we waited. They needed me, but I needed them more!

I know there are more exciting and braver things teachers did that day, but at P.S. 127, we gave our students the assurance and support they needed, then and for the days and months after. The UFT was wonderful as well, letting me know that there were other teachers like me, and giving me support.

Diane Fairben

My sister-in-law Susan Ann Ruggiero died in the towers on 9/11 (96th fl). I went to look for her on 9/12. My family and hers never cried so much or so hard. We expected to sort through injured victims to find her. There were none. This was very hard to understand. We went from Hospital to hospital looking for her. The Red Cross was amazing, so caring, so compassionate.

My sister, her father, brother and I did not want to go home. It meant telling my brother that we didn't find her.

Through DNA, her remains were found in November of 2001. She is buried in Holy Rude in a triangle for 9/11 victims. We never got over her loss, we only learn to live with it. We miss her daily.

Susan Nagy



MOVING FORWARD

A week earlier I had introduced my students to writing a journal. Give details, I told them. Let readers see and feel what you describe. One student volunteered to read aloud her first entry. She wrote of a trip taken with her family to Connecticut. On the way her father had driven through lower Manhattan to let the children see the Twin Towers up close. The girl described deserted streets that almost seemed ghostly on an early Sunday morning and she mentioned the massive walls that had seemed so small when viewed from Brooklyn. She read this to the class on the Friday before the Towers fell.

Early on September 11, school administrators decided not to tell the students about the catastrophe. Early too, parents started coming to the school to pick up their children. Now, as my third period class took their seats, I wondered how many knew. I instructed class monitors to distribute the journals. Normally, this would be the beginning of five to seven minutes of free writing, but today was different: I would chose the topic. "Somewhere at this moment there are people in great danger – hurting badly and in pain. I would like you to write something to give them comfort – a wish, a hope, a prayer."

Without a murmur, students started writing – quietly think-

ing, searching their souls as they wrote and wrote. And what they wrote was amazing: verses from The Psalms; the words of Spirituals; church prayers; exhortations, and simple words of comfort and hope. Their words tumbled on to the pages; they must have known.

In the days that followed, more students asked to read their journals aloud, and they continued to write about family and neighbors who were changed forever. One boy wrote how his mom had escaped, losing her shoes in the effort and had reached home covered in dust and soot. Embracing her, he too had gotten the grime all over him as they held each other weeping. A girl wrote about a favorite uncle who was still missing, and as the days passed there was less hope in her voice.

The author of "Family trip to Connecticut" re-read her old entry. This time classmates heard it through different ears. What followed was a discussion on primary sources in writing. The Twin Towers had existed and now they were gone. But the one student had seen them up close and had written about them. At that moment I knew that all my students held their own historical documents that one day they could show to their grandchildren.

Patrick J. McAvey

There was a family in my school with four daughters. I taught two of the girls.

When I found out that the child I had was giving up basketball, her love for the Yankees, and all of the things she did with her dad, because he had been killed in the World Trade Center, I went over to visit her.

We sat on the steps of her apartment and talked. I gave her a blank, hard covered book and sat there and told her to draw a picture of the Yankee emblem on the front. Then I told her to write all her thoughts, both good and bad, in this book to express her emotions.

The next day I got a call from her mom telling me her older sister wished she had one, too. I immediately dropped off a notebook for her, too. The family has grown, the girls and mom are good. Counseling, peer groups and love has helped this family to move on. Not a day goes by without those memories, and their love for the Yankees continues.

Debbie Braunstein

I was, at that time, the orchestra director for I.S. 96. We then had the largest I.S. string program in the city. We were scheduled to play at the Dial-a-Teacher event at the Sheraton on October 20. All trips were cancelled following 9/11. Somehow, inexplicably, we were given a bus and on a crisp October Saturday morning headed for Manhattan.

As we approached the Manhattan Bridge the bus was stopped by a group of soldiers with rifles. The students were sobered by this, and became very quiet. After a brief inspection we were allowed on to the bridge.

We started slowly over the Manhattan Bridge. All eyes were on the still smoldering ruins of the Towers. From the back of the bus I heard a lone voice begin to sing the Star Spangled Banner. That voice was joined by another, and another until the whole bus resounded with the singing of the national anthem. These were students of every hue, whose families came from every part of the globe. At that moment they were all Americans. It was truly inspiring.

I felt proud and privileged to be with them. I know that none of us will ever forget those few minutes on the bridge.

Kenneth Kushel



NEW BEGINNINGS

I was not yet teaching on 9/11...but it is how I found my way to teaching. I was a Broadway and touring company manager for shows. As I drove down the west side highway to rehearsal I saw the planes hit the World Trade Center and heard the event unfold on the radio as I was watching it live from my car.

We attempted to carry on rehearsing when news of the towers falling and missing planes came to us. After consideration the company sent us home for the day. We returned the next day to what looked like a deserted Times Square. I was told that the show was ready and I needn't come back.

After 19 months of unemployment, because no one knew how the economy would play out at that time, I attended a job fair. There I met a recruiter for the New York Teaching Fellows. I filled out an application and was accepted. 9/11 literally changed my life.

They say that out of every tragedy comes a miracle. For me the miracle was being led to a place where I could touch the lives of children and their families and their lives certainly touch mine.

Every year I pray that this will be the year my kids will know peace and that we move forward, always remembering how one day can change so many lives.

Lynn Manuell

I have been a teacher for only six years, but 9/11 was pivotal in making me one.

I was nine months pregnant. I was working at an insurance company, and on that day, I decided I had to do something that was more important than getting agent's fees paid.

That is the day I decided to get my master's degree and become a teacher, and I have never been unhappy about that decision.

Laurel Weber

LENDING A HAND

I was part of a group of UFT Teacher Center colleagues who opened and categorized the outpourings of gifts and supporting messages from students from all over the country, who had sent books, original drawings, lovely, sensitive letters, etc. for the school children of New York.

I was in tears most of the time as I opened boxes filled with the compassion, understanding, and solidarity of those students, and it was supremely gratifying to repack and direct the offerings to many schools, so that our students could experience the love and caring coming from children across the nation.

Despite the stunning shock and devastation of 9/11, it was genuinely uplifting and reaffirming to be part of the process of “emotional reconstruction” from a humane and supportive national community. As unforgettable as the horrors of 9/11 were, the memory of those many thousands of gifts and messages is the counterbalance that reminds me of our common, and essentially good, humanity.

Jonathan Molofsky

In the days that followed, my leadership students collected \$5,000 and donated the money to a city fund.

We also set up bulletin boards with pictures and news articles about the event. A separate board was available for anyone to write down personal notes.

We later discovered the names of several former students and relatives of current students who died on that day.

We held a moment of silence to honor all the victims and their families. American flags were displayed everywhere. It was a time to come together as one family.

Jeffrey Litman

We made it a class project to do “something” that would help. I allowed the class to discuss ideas with each other, and find a way that we could raise money for the families of firefighters who had perished in the attack. My class voted for “freedom bracelets,” which they made from red, white and blue beads, and sold in the cafeteria during lunch periods. They sold over two hundred bracelets, and we were able to get Newsday and another corporation to each match our donation.

Not only did the students do something to help (at a time when we all felt helpless), but it served as a bonding experience for all of us — years later, I can honestly say that year’s class was the most tight-knit community of learners that I have ever had the opportunity to teach.

I will never forget the tragedy we faced that day, but I choose to remember the closeness and sense of community that resulted among my students and the school community as a whole.

Jennifer L. Semlies

We collected food, water, gloves, sterile eye drops, bandages etc. for relief sites (around the city). Since my daughter and I worked at the Staten Island Richmond Stadium center every day and night after school, I would bring back lists of items needed and let the students know of the general events taking place and how much their donations were appreciated.

I described the meals we made for the police and firemen who were being ferried from Ground Zero to the stadium for food and basic medical treatment. I also explained how food and necessary items were transported to Staten Island. Students were interested in knowing what was being done. I think it was cathartic for them to be able to do something to help rather than feeling helpless.

Laura Lowrie

REFLECTIONS AND HOPE

I could not be prouder
of the grace, calm,
unity, decisiveness,
and courage shown by
our administrative and
mental health staff that
day and the days and
weeks that followed.

Pamela Behrman

New York Nightmare

*Beautiful skyline, sunny day
Everyone scurrying on their way
Twin Towers standing tall and erect
Representing much of what we respect.*

*Sudden aircraft changes the scene
Like a tornado swift and mean
Setting the Towers all ablaze
Leaving behind debris and haze.*

*Thousands of people saw their end
Thousands mourn family and friend
As the Towers continued to fall
The future seemed dim to us all.*

*America caught by terrorists' rage
Another chapter in our page
Of survival and tested strength
To overcome at any length.*

*A time for God, a time to pray
To see us through another day
Hope and the Ultimate Power
Can protect us in this hour.*

Mary Dixon Lake



I wish that day had
never occurred, but
the beauty of a nation
standing together in the
name of peace is how
I will remember that
dreadful day.

Pilar Wilkins

I literally saw the
students age that day.
They saw history unfold
before their eyes and
learned that it is real.

Kelly Woodward

I pray every day that
the youngest of this
generation will be
spared the trauma and
enjoy the beautiful life
that this country offers.

Diane Kesten

9/11

*We watched them rise block upon block of glass
and steel into long bands of light*

*transforming the silhouette of New York
with their triumphant brilliance of height*

*filling quickly with a babble of languages
of trade, windows on the world, a symbol, a target*

*on an ordinary September day decades later
when the phone rings: "Turn on your TV! A jet's hit*

*one of the twin towers!" My friend and I breathe
together in horror as a second plane*

*flies into the north tower leaving its outline for
a moment
like a cartoon creature crashing through a wall.*

*But this is real. Real. Within a shroud of smoke
the towers crumble and sink where moments
before*

*firefighters marched up to their falling deaths
passing the lucky single-filing down*

*into air opaque with debris, ash and screams.
What was left was a hole of loss so deep and wide*

*we couldn't believe it. We had to see it.
Millions came to shuffle along the viewing
platform.*

*Then months of photographs and messages
posted on fences,
compiling of an official list of names of the
dead and missing*

*that can never be complete, perhaps, without
the real name
of an illegal immigrant kitchen worker or a
homeless man*

*hiding in the lobby or a lone tourist from
another country
who may be buried beneath tons of rubble in this*

*crematorium, a monument still. That day so
seared
us, we will remember always where we were
when we heard*

*the news, who we were with, and that last
message
a doomed man left on a phone tape, "I'm just
calling*

*to say I'm okay. But if I don't get out of this, I want
you to know that I love you." If there is a
lesson, it's this.*

Sarah Brown Weitzman

The wounds of that
horrible day in our city
have forever changed
the skyline, but not our
spirit!

Cathy Eberle

A Day Not To Be Forgotten

*On September 11, 2011 terrorists
struck the city's twin towers
Who dared to do this, who thought
they had the powers?
Our incredible skyline of New York
city will never be the same
The senseless destruction, shows
only steel and ashes remain.*

*Not only the twin towers, but also the
Pentagon,
So many people missing, so many
lives gone.
Policemen, firemen, rescue workers
recover so very few
Their efforts are endless, their losses
unbearably true.*

*Pictures of loved ones, no one again
will see
This should not be happening in the
land of the free.
Tears flow freely, the strongest cry
As the world watches and wonders,
why?*

*Everyone talks, reaching out for each
other
Hugs for once a stranger – now our
brother.
New Yorkers are strong, as is our
nation.
We will rise through this crisis and
through participation,*

*Defend our country and wave our flag
proudly
We are the United States of America
and we'll chant it loudly.*

Rita Jones

I returned to work on September 13, 2001. I was never so grateful for work and for the ability to lose myself in work with innocent young children.

What answers could we give them when questions were asked? We met with counselors and administrators before students returned to school and learned how best to deal with traumatized children and what not to say as well as what to say.

Children were not allowed to play outside for many days. After they were allowed to return outside to play, one 1st grader told me that he did not want to go outside to play “because of the smoke” which he must have seen so much of on television. Another 2nd grader gave me a huge hug and told me she was afraid of the “bad guys.” I hugged her back with tears in my eyes and knew that certain innocence would never return to this generation of children.

I honestly think this horrific attack has made me a better person and a better and more patriotic American. I’ve always loved my country but I love it in a different way now. I love it passionately. I cherish my freedom like never before.

Loretta Henke

Emotions

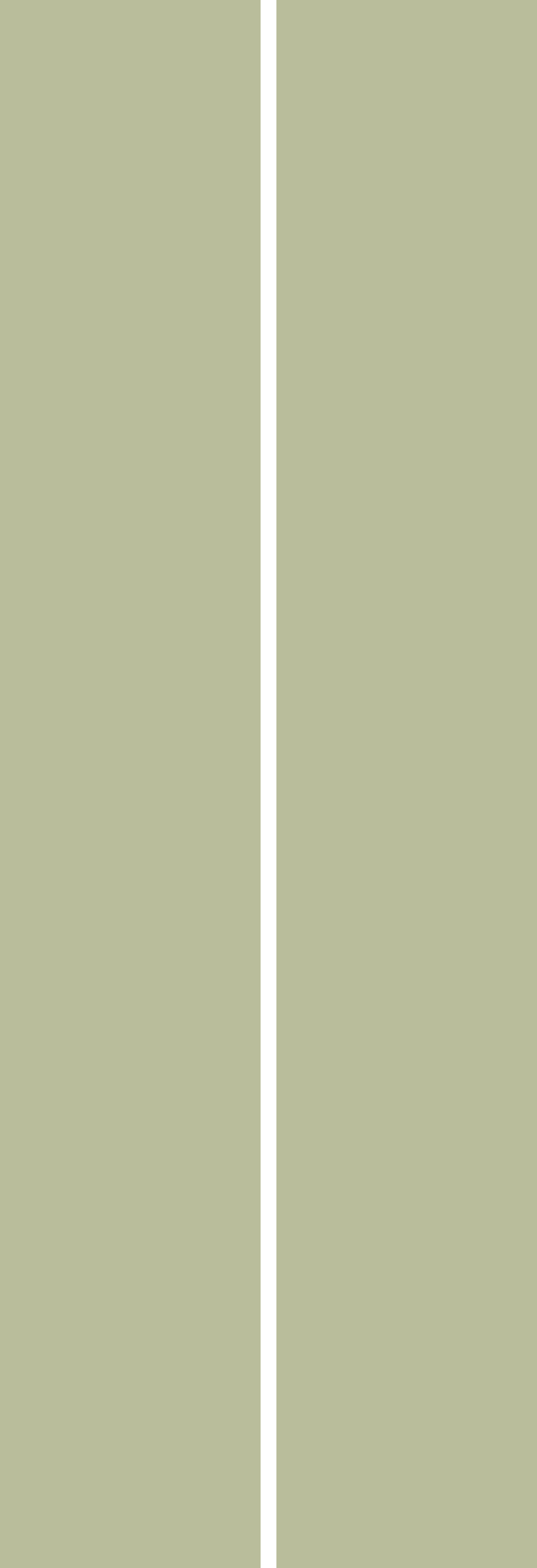
*I looked up at the sky, peaceful
and blue,
All that would soon change, but no
one knew.
Why – this senseless violence?
Why – were innocent lives lost?
The evil ones spread terror, no matter
what
the cost.
How could they believe any God
would condone such a loss of life?
How could their followers create this
act of strife?
As terror filled our skies,
a sadness filled our lives,
and
from these actions of the worst
came reactions from our best, as they
toiled,
with no rest.
These heroes made us proud,
within the gray, dust covered shroud
and
as dark fell with the night,
our hearts were filled with fright.
Be strong for our children,
I heard someone say –
So we all held hands and began to
pray.
The sky lit up with candles of hope
as we all try to find a way to cope.
Let’s all come together,
to heal those still alive
For we are all Americans and we
know how to survive!*

Linda Fanelli

We all came together as a family. This is one of the many times I was proud to be a New York City teacher.

Ron Smith





This book is dedicated to the members of the United Federation of Teachers, who never hesitate to go above and beyond the call of duty.

September 11th
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